ANJALI

TAGORE LECTURES

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...RAJA SERFOJI'S SARAS...
THANJAVUR.

We are to adopt a real, not a
historic, estimate of Poetry

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For

Kishore who played on the Annamalai Grounds

THE MAKING OF GITANJALI

" A writer impossible wholly to understand "

T. S. Eliot

I am deeply sensible of the honour the University of Annamalai has done me in asking me to give the Tagore lectures for the year 1972. I am grateful to the university and to my friend Professor R. Sundararaju, whom we all have come to know so well in the academic field.

In speaking to-day of *Gitanjali*, the longest of Indo-English poems, which won the Nobel prize in 1913 which in our ordinary language, we are driven to designate however vagueiy, as " great ", I shall be dealing with the contexts of *Gitanjali* and to what kind of use the poet has put the material available to him. While one subjects Tagore's poetry to critical judgement one is aware of the limitations under which a non-Bengali reader of Tagore works. His poetry is popular not only among the Bengalis, but also wherever the English language is spoken. In 1956, Tagore's lines formed the texts of prayer meetings in schools in England. At present, he is potential and even magisterial. When Bangladesh was passing through a tortuous period, the spirit of the people was kept up by one of his most popular songs *Sonar Bangala* (Golden Bengal), which lives in the consciousnees of the people even to-day. The folk rhythm of this limerick is effective :

My Sonar Bangala, I love you,
Ever your skies, your breeze,
Play the flute in my heart.

The political and social idealism of the people of Bangladesh sanctified by the blood of the war found solace in Rabindra Sangeeth in its painful moments. As one who grew up with literature and music around himself, Tagore composed poems which possessed the possibilities of combination of music and recitation. The history of Tagore's reception in English during the early part of the century is almost as important to an understanding of English taste and sensibility as it is to the appraisal of the poet, and this may help us to show why it is unwise to judge Tagore's poetry like the poetry of Keats or Shelley, but to treat it on its own. We are concerned with the thought and milieu of Tagore. It matters little whether he is read in Bengali or in English, one has to see the substance for the shadow. Here we are reminded of Eliot's words on Dante.

> The style of Dante has a peculiar lucidity -- a *poetic* distinguished from an *intellectual* lucidity. The thought may be obscure, but the word is lucid, or rather translucent. In English poetry words have a kind of capacity which is part of their beauty. I do not mean that the beauty of English poetry is what is called mere 'verbal beauty'. It is rather that words have associations, and the groups of words *in* association have associations, which is a kind of local self-consciousness, because they are the growth of a *particular* civilization; and the same thing is true of other modern languages. The Italian of Dante, though essentially the Italian of to-day, is not in this way a modern language. The culture of Dante was not of one European country but of Europe.[1]

For the student of Indian letters in English or the regional languages, the Bengali Renaissance began with Toru

[1] *Selected Essays*, 1932, pp. 239-240.

Dutt and reached its peak with Tagore. The Bengali Renaissance is a very noteworthy phenomenon. It is not unique, for similar developments took place in most of the linguistic areas, but it was the earliest, and by far the most productive. From Ram Mohan Roy onwards Bengal gave birth to a really remarkable series of religious thinkers, social reformers, philosophers, publicists, political leaders, lawyers, educationists, and academic specialists of all kinds, who created a modern literature which, it is claimed, can stand comparison with that of any country. Tagore is its greatest literary figure, but he does not stand entirely alone. Two novelists, Bankim Chandra and Sarat Chandra, are also known in translation everywhere in India.

Tagore is primarily a poet, but he also wrote plays short stories, novels, essays and a vast number of songs, which are set to his own music. His music is highly and universally esteemed in Bengal. His painting is remarkable but controversial. He has a place as an educationist also. His literary out-put was enormous, and much of it has been translated into English. He did not write much in English himself, but he took part with others in the translation of several of his works, in particular, *Gitanjali*, with which Yeats helped him.

While we critically examine *Gitanjati*, the poet's personality could hardly be overlooked ; it is thrust at the reader. The two influences which shine through the poetry of Tagore are rain and Kalidasa's *Meghdut* (The Cloud Messenger). The two are interrelated. In *Meghdut*, Yaksha sends his messages through the clouds on the first day of *Ashada* to his love in Alaka : Tagore sings :

In my closed dim room
I read the Meghdut ; on the cloudrack's spume.
My mind, in freedom wandering from home,
If flying from land to land.

Under this influence, he composed a poem and an essay, using symbolically the separation between Alaka and Ramagiri hills as an everlasting gulf between the prosaic present and a poetical past and the lack of common union between one person and another. Tagore's *Meghdut*, although lacking in *chawani* or suggestion, characteristically becomes philosophical in that the soul of the dear one is lost in the depths of the submerged self which the lovers cannot comprehend. *A Dream* is another poem saturated with the echoes of *the Meghdut*. Its opening recalls the six seasons. The very many descriptions of the rains abound in his poetry and prose. His concc.ption of the rain across the Indian landscape is suggestive :

> Today the sky is dark with pouring rain ;
> A dire wind sweeps : beneath its dreadful fl ail
> With lifted hands the forests sob and wail :
> The lightning rips the clouds it peeps and peers,
> Hurling through empty space its crookod spears
> Of sharp-edged laughter.

Tagore is not a dedicated artist in the sense Milton is, but composes as the stirrings of poetry come to him ; there are stirrings of poetry in his early prose work also. William Butler Yeats, like Tagore, began as a rather dreamy and ineffectual poet and did not acquire the muscle and power until he was a man in his forties. We need not speculate about what type of poet Tagore might have turned out to be had he not given his full attention to stories and novels as he did. Far more to the poet, is to trace his development from the poet of *Songs of Love* to the author of *Gitanjali*.

One can hardly overstate the fact that Tagore's verse is late romantic verse, although the lines strongly resemble the *Vachanas* or the *Vaishnava lyrics*. The poets who had caught

his imagination and whom he was consciously and unconsciously imitating were the poets of the Romantic age and the nineties. Like theirs, this young poet's world reared on the epics, had grown tired and old. He harks back to a brighter and ampler day in which he visualises the presence of the travellers in a boat on a canal, encounters a woman filling a pitcher of water as in "The Fugitive"; or a woman with a pot of water on her back walking in "A Moment's Meeting." Nature, to be sure, still moves through its commonplace experience of the shy woman being heard through her retreating foot-steps and tinkling of her wristlets against water or the woman peeping at the speaker through her fluttering veil of *purdah* and turning away when spoken to. He luxuriantly describes nature and human nature like his spiritual *Guru*, Kalidasa. But a sensitive and a sophisticated observer of today cannot conceal from himself the fact that the rural world lingers only in occasional nook of sequestered beauty and in the memory of poets and dreamers of India. Tagore spells out for us part of the story of his early verse in *Kavi Vahini* (A poet's story) :

> My mind has nothing in it but hot vapour, and vapour-filled bubbles frothed and eddied around a vortex of lazy fancies, aimless and unmeaning. No forms were evolved, there was only the dis traction of movement, a bubbling up, a bursting back into froth.[1]

This heart-search makes him take stock of his early compositions.

The influence of Kalidasa is general and pervasive rather a matter of specific borrowings. The images of the early

[1] K. Kripalani, *Tagore : Life*, Mahendra, New Delhi, 1962, p. 29.

short lyrics are drawn from the life around him and treated in the manner of a visionary. The image that makes up the interrogative which flashes its own answer is characteristic of Tagore :

> Is your heart lost to the lover calling you across
> his immeasurable loneliness ?[1]

The line has mystical overtones. One recalls Arnold's criticism of Wordsworth's poetry that there are short lyrics in which the poet opens out the soul of familiar things and the long narratives in which he becomes philosophical. As philosopher Bradley said that there are excellent things in both the kinds. In short lyrics, Tagore is subjective and he endeavours to embody a kind of pleasing melancholy. It arises from his ecstatic joy. The images of the women with full pitcher of water upon her hip appear in " The Fugitive " and " The Gardener ", and in *Gitanjali*. The experiences are the same ; both of them give expression to pleasing melancholy. This is not a special quality I would ascribe to our most intense poetry. I do not want to suggest that there lurks at the heart of every Tagore's poem, like a precious stone embedded in a ring, some incident of disappointment and loss, the thought that scarred the poet's soul and generated the poem. What interests us most is his use of the ingredients - their vitality consists in the application of the disparate and even contradictory :

> You are hidden as a star behind the hills,
> and I am a passer—by upon the road.[2]

---

[1] *Collected poems and plays of Rabindranath Tagore*, Macmillan, 1967, p. 405.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 105

A poem is not authentic unless it reflects in its own make-up the contradiction of the world that we actually know through our experience. The *Upameya* and *upamana* should impinge upon one another :

> It came to me like the bird of the evening that
> hurriedly flies across the lampless room from the one
> open window to the other, and disappears in the night.[1]

In his " Hound of Heaven " Francis Thompson expostulated with his God, asking him why He needs must dung His fields with rotten death. Whatever the theological answer, the answer for poetry is quite clear. Such dreadful fertilization is needed as poetry is no airplant. Even the most heavenly blossoms draw their beauty from roots that go down into the soil of mortality. Hence Tagore manures his realm with things he sees everyday : the housewife's anxiety to attend on the guest, the bangle-seller arriving at noon, the housewife s daily chores form the milieu of his "poetry", a very special kind of prose-that-is-really-poetry. As I have been trying to emphasise, much of this passionate prose has to be seen as the development of images and metaphors which appeared in the early verse and this makes an easy transition to our study of *Gitanjali*.

In this general connection, it is worth noting that *Gitanjali or Song offerings* is composed during the various periods of his poetic career. The English translation of the *Song offerings* to God were first shown to William Rothenstein, in 1912, when Tagore went to England for recouping his health. W. B. Yeats came across them, he wrote :

> I have carried the manuscript of these translations
> about with me fore days, reading it in railway trains,
> or on the top of omnibuses and in restaurants, and

[1] *Collected Poems and Plays*, p. 105

> I have often had to close it lest some stranger would see how muc it moved me.'

A. C. Bradley on reading them thought that the author was a major poet. The India Society published the collection in 1912, when it won the Nobel prize; the Macmillan reprinted it in 1913 and it ran into many editions.

It is easy to assess the reputation of a work which has won the world's highest literary prize, however much our cultured *cognoscente* may try to do-otherwise. But my concern is with its making. Its form call it poetic or prosaic, is indigenous. Originally, the songs were written to be sung they are " prose poems " of images of powerful evocations after the model of *Vaishnava lyrics*, combined with a stream of the influence of folk-tale and folk-poetry. These elements add variety. The non-Bengali reader, perhaps, misses the musical movement of the originals as Yeats ruefully referred to the subtlety of the rhythms, which he could not enjoy as he did not know Bengali. The English translation read like prose hymns, if one listens to Bengali originals set to music (even without the knowledge of the language) perhaps one can hear the flow of verse making one phrase glide into another. This is avoided in English; I read stanza VI.

> Pluck this little flower and take it. Delay not! I fear lest it droop and drop into the dust.
> It may not find a place in thy garland, but honour it with a touch of pain from thy hand and pluck it. I fear lest the day and before I am aware, and the time of offering go by.
> Though its colour be not deep and its smell be faint, use this flower in thy service and pluck it while there is time[2]

[1] R. Tagore, *Gitanjali*, 1938, xiii
[2] *Collected Poem and Plays*, p. 5

The line of internal rhythms, images evoking piety strike the ear of a non-Bengali. A nervous rhythm made out of juxtaposition of values runs through many of the poems :

> Here is thy footstool and there rest thy feet where live the poorest, and lowliest, and lost.

Some of the lines reminiscent of Shelley (as E.J. Thompson points out) in his mythopea, or compound adjectives - in their vague and dreamy quality, made up of the rhythms of the psalms crowd in upon a willing reader.

> There comes the morning with the golden basket in her right hand bearing the wreath of beauty, silently to crown the earth.
>
> And there comes the evening over the lonely meadows deserted by herds, through reckless paths, carrying cool draughts of peace in her golden pitcher from the western ocean of rest.

Tagore's poetry needed to call his muse home. But he needed something more. His poetry like Shelley's required an ample context for its proper development. Again like Shelley, most of all he needed in that context elements of romanticisms sufficient to fill it with a sense of prettiness and for the reader of to-day even a sense of faded romanticism. This is not to argue that had he continued to write verse he might not have achieved the requisite muscular force and power through a process of condensation and compression. Perhaps, he might have. The best of his poems suggest the possibility. Yet, on the other hand, the kind of thing which he does so magnificently in the best of his verse might have been wasted had he persisted in trying to tone down and tighten rather than expand and complicate and enrich the

efforts of the "prose poems". He writes this kind of poem with fervour he tells himself implicitly "I love love, Misery, Evening, Day and my heart."

One can illustrate by asking the readers to read poem LVIII. The nine-line poem beginning with :

Let all the strains of joy mingle in my last song.

It is, in fact, one of Tagore's most successfully and completely formed prose poems. The clauses of descriptive quality have a special effectiveness. All the strains of joy merge into one last song, it is unalloyed, pure joy :

> The joy that throws everything it has upon the dust, and knows not a word.

It is difficult to come across such a highly individual rendering of one side of the Hindu mind, of the main themes of ancient scriptures, the *Upanishads* in succinct statements as here :

> My poet, is it thy delight to see my
> creation through my eyes and to stand at
> the portals of my ears silently to listen
> to thine own eternal harmony.

One does not want to claim too much for this kind of poetry but one cannot miss the distinctive features. There is a kind of ecstatic leap of faith :

> O fool, to try to carry thyself upon thy shoulders !
> O beggar, to come to beg at thy own door !

Incidentally, it may be mentioned that interpretations of the Upanishads differ. For the most part Tagore seems to lean to theistic type of interpretation, but here and there he gives expression to a different view :

In this playhouse of infinite forms I avhe had
my play, and here have I caught sight of the formless.

He can summon his senses in one salutation to God, which " will hang low like a rain-cloud of July with its burden of unshed showers."

All this he derives not only from the *Upanishads*, but from experience. As a youngman, he enjoyed the mystic's unitive vision, as he explains, in his *Reminiscences*, and sets forth in his early play, *Nature's Revenge*. In " The rain-cloud of July " as a pleasing sight, one feels the pressure of rain and cool breeze on a pious mind and it moves with internal rhymes to help the devotee to achieve the requisite frame of mind.

In this bunch of "Song Offerings", there is a poem, which originally included in the collection of twenty seven poems called *Smarana* or Remembrance composed in the memory of his dead wife. Although it is to be regarded as an elegy, it finds place in *Gitanjali* and the lines constitute no mean achievement.

In desperate hope I go and search for her in all the corners of my room ; I find her not.
My house is small and what once has gone from it can never be regained.
But infinite is thy mansion, my lord, and seeking her
I have come to thy door.
I stand under the golden canopy of thine evening sky
and I lift my eager eyes to thy face.
I have come to the brink of eternity from which
nothing can vanish - no hope, no happiness, no vision of a face seen through tears.
Oh, dip my emptied life into that ocean, plunge it
into the deeper fullness. Let me for once feel that lost
sweet touch in the allness of the universe.

This is a poem born of grievous bereavement and deep crisis in his personal life. It is a profoundly moving poem, the sorrow is merged in devotion. As a firm believer, he vigorously puts his plea for immortality. It has lines of suggestion, the loss is irrevocable, and he describes the handiwork of nature and his faith is firm :

I have come to the brink of eternity from which
nothing can vanish

The concepts of " Infinite mansion " and " golden-canopy " (the sky becoming golden suggests death) are substantial images in a poem of grief. One need not stress the difference between the vaguely " literary" poeticizing of the verse (But infinite is thy mansion, my lord, and seeking her I have come to thy door) and a prose rhetoric (Oh, dip my emptied life into that ocean) so magnificent that one cannot fail to accord it the name of poetry.

There are poems of deep feeling and suggestion with the snatches of description which make them poetic :

A summons has come and I am ready for my journey.

In the *Song offerings*, he uses images of great variety to delineate occasions of sadess and joy.

The children are dear to the heart of the poet, it is said that many a time he changed a word or two whenever a small boy to whom he sang his songs did not understand the word. The author of *The Iliad* was inspired by the sight of the children playing with the sand on the shore. In Homer, the children playing with sand on the sea shore is a celebrated scene. With this at the back of his mind, the poet composes poem LX. Ordinary images are developed to their immense advantage and invested with significance.

On the seashore of endless worlds children meet. The infinite sky is motionless overhead and the restless water is boisterous. On the seashore of endless worlds the children meet with shouts and dances.

The poet describes a scene of the children on the seashore, the epithet "endless" is used to describe world and the children who are immersed in play and joy are unaware of the "hidden treasures" and "how to cast nests", they are indifferent to "Death dealing waves" and "meaningless ballads." The children are indifferent to hazards of the world and their devotion to play makes the elders feel the futility of their pursuits. The sea takes the place of the mother and plays with them. Here the analogy is obvious: the children are irrepressible, full of vitality. It is a sad commentary on the meaningless activities of the joy of being young in a context of serious thought. This is the fresh apprehension. Likewise, "the sleep that flits on baby's eyes", "the smile that flickers on baby's lips", "the soft freshness that blooms on baby's limbs" convey the musical setting of the poet's joy in children, who are immortalised in his stories too. But Tagore's free verse, sometimes, is playing tennis with the net down. The rhythmic pulse is weak, and his line division arbitrary.

For his poetry, although Tagore was under the influence of the Romantics and European poets, he needed a medium which was at once more or less demanding than that of conventional verse. He needed a room to turn around, room for repetition, room for expansion of a devotee's heart. Most of all he needed the kind of context which would allow him to set up a real tension between his mere

purely "literary" tendencies and his sense of solid and pious world. As in the songs of Vaishnava poets, using the images of Krishna and Radha, he composed some poems whose basis is love, pure and pious :

> Only thou and I, . . would know of this
> our pure pilgrimage to no country and to no end

The image is ethereally beautiful, but it is once more in tension with an earthly context. He yearns for the unknown he questions himself.

> *Have* you not heard his silent steps ? He comes, comes, ever comes.
> Every moment and every age, every day and every night he comes, comes ever comes.

These lines throb, hammer and thump to convey the torment in the heart of a devotee.

At first Tagore was attracted to Brahmo Samaj, later he became a strong admirer of Buddhism. This is clear from his play, *Chandalika*, and the song number LIV in *Gitanjali*. The images of the cuckoo, the rustling leaves, the perfume of *babla* flowers are used poetically to tell the story of Chandalika and Ananda. When Ananda, a member of the high caste, in a dreamy state speaks low and says, "Ah, I am a thirsty traveller" and Chandalika, an untouchable, pours water on his joined palms, the quality of the poetry is confe·red on them through the poet's vision. The poet having shown the inequality of status in life, uses nature which makes no distiuction between high and low. The poem makes a good deal of the fact that just when, water was

poured from her pot on Ananda's joined palms, the Cuckoo sang from the unseen dark. Very different it is in Shakespeare in the charming spring Song of *Love's Labours Lost* :

> Cuckoo Cuckoo ", O, word of fear,
> unpleasing to a married ear !

Tagore is not thinking of the ominous portent of infidelity and cuckoldry. But Chandalika is haunted by the memory that she could give water to Ananda to allay his thirst. This will cling to her heart and enfold it in sweetness. Elsewhere the celebration of complete surrender is expressed. :

> I came out alone on my way to my tryst. Bu- who is this that follows me in the silent dark ?

His own "little self" or shadow pursues him. This may be compared with Donne's poem "A Lecture upon the Shadow." The collection of "Song offerings" are studied at more than one level : ethereal and physical. Love is treated on physical and spiritual planes and the love questions :

> Ah, why do I ever miss his sight whose breath touches my sleep ?

But the poet warns :

> Leave off your singing and chanting of beads

One of the most purely lyrical poems of this group is the poem No. LXV. It expresses his faith which is certain :

> What divine drink would'st thou have, myGod,
> from this overflowing cup of my life ?

The poet rejoices in implicit faith :

> Thou givest thyself to me in love and then feelest thine own entire sweetness in me

It also adds, for those who care to see it, another dimension to the poem : the reference to God, who acts through the poet.

We should not think, it is strange that "simple" songs such as these turn out not to be simple - that they are made up of, not of homogeneous, but hetrogeneous materials, and that their unity has been achieved through a harmonizing of the desparate and the discordant. Metaphor itself exhibits such a structure. The poet does not assert that God is poet or to use well-worn examples, not that a rose is a rose but that his love is a rose or that the minds of true lovers are like two wheels of a cart.

Tagore uses natural objects to document the many aspects of creation. It is said that in Rabindranath flowers are always opening and the South wind is always blowing. We have read nature's description in the poets of the East and West. But man's apprehension of his world has to be constantly freshened, redeemed from staleness - sometimes even rediscovered. Because this is true, we so often apply to poetry adjectives like 'surprising', fresh, original,' and 'wonderful'. The great Romantics, Wordsworth and Coleridge, stressed surprise and wonder as proper to all poetry, and described their own aim in the "Lyrical Ballads" as an attempt either to give substance to the marvellous or to render the ordinary commonplace, fresh and new :

> I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of this world of life. The great pageant of thee and me has overspread the sky.

what was the power that made me open out into this vast mystery like a bud in the forest at midnight.

Even the girl, who in the evening fills her pitcher with water is a picture of freshness.

Her wonder :

> I know not whom I shall chance to meet. There at the fording in the little boat the unknown man plays upon his lute.

It is suggestive of Lord Krishna's playing on the flute to win his devotees.

I have already alluded to his many references to rain, it is the season of union and separation. The rain is described very imaginatively. One of his stories 'Cloud and Sun' abounds in myriad descriptions of rain : It is used to set forth the doctrine of the separation-in-union :

> It is this sorrow of separation that gazes in silence all night from star to star and becomes lyric among rustling leaves in rainy darkness of July.

Samuel Taylor Colerdige warned us against enforcing any act of uniformity against the poet. We should not disregard his warning even when we discuss Tagore's poetry. The house of poetry has many mansions : in the house of poetry, comedy has its place as well as tragedy. Generous provision is also made for the joyous celebratian of life and for the simple and charming lyric celebrating death and sorrow. There are lyrics celebrating death, the poet woos death just as he woos Love. To him, death will come as a pilot to take the helm. In him, Life and Death are the union of opposites, he sings :

> Because I love this life, I know I shall love death as well. Thy gifts to us mortals fulfill all our needs and yet run back to thee undiminished.

He does not want to dread death, he is always prepared for it, when death knocks at his door, he will never let him go with empty hands. Using the image of a bridegroom, he courts death. Like Cleopatra putting on her robes to be bitten by an asp to die, he puts on his wedding garland and prepares to receive death which he decorates. Using a homely image, he says.

> The child cries out when from the right breast the mother takes it away, in the very next moment to find in the left one its consolation.

Life prepares him for Death

Although a believer in rebirth, to him

> Deliverance is not for me in renunciation. I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight.

Tagore harmonises contrasts — Life and Death — and it constitutes his poetry. 'Poetry' says W. B. Yeats 'comes out of our 'quarrel with others'. It may seem odd that a poet, a great lyric poet should think of poetry as issuing from a quarrel of any kind. The fact that he does so affords one an opportunity to underline the notion that poetry is not a boquet of poetic flowers, but a harmonising of the disparate and the contradictory. Be that as it may, if we grant the quarrel analogy has any validity, then surely Tagore is right in making the relevant quarrel within himself. His attitudes to Nature and Death are born of a process

of self-discovery and self-realisation. After writing that poetry is made up of the 'quarrel with ourselves', Yeats goes on, that 'unlike the rhetoricians, who get a confident voice from remembering the crown that they have won or may win, we (poets) sing amid our uncertainty.' 'Uncertainty' because the poet has no programme to implement and explore his nature, but try to discover the nature of reality itself. In the collection offered to God, Tagore is concerned with the nature of *Jibandevata* or *Jivandevata* which means Life-God or the master poet. It is the Oversoul who binds in sequence the poet's successive incarnations and phases of activity. His footstool is where live the poorest, and loweliest and lost. He seeks affinities with this personal God like the composers of hymns.

In *Gitanjali*, we have songs of death, songs of nature and songs of patriotism. The poet is on a journey of a vision of reality. In early Indo-English literature, the lustre of *Gitanjali* is as solitary as the light cast by the Vaishnava lyricists or the composers of *Vachanas* in Karnataka in their vision of the search towards perfection.

—o—

IDEAS INTO DRAMA : TAGORE AND YEATS AS PLAYWRIGHTS

> " Dramatic criticisms, or should be concerned soley with dramatic art even at the expense of bankrupting every theatre in the country "
>
> *George Jean Nathen*

" It pleases me to fancy that when we turn towards the East, in or out of Church, we are turning not less to the ancient West and North ; one fragment of pagan Irish philosophy come down, ' the song of Amergin ' seems Asiatic . . ."

Yeats and Tagore writing plays about the same time partook of different traditions but share common tendencies. The plays of both poets are generally thought of as less important than their poetry. The stories of the plays are often taken from mythology. Yeats's stories are given relevance to ordinary life, but Tagore's choice of material and obvious relevance to his audience in India. Underneath what seem fables, however, there are in many of the plays of both playwrights allusions to Neo-Platonic or Upanishadic religion and philosophy, and this, like the ideas of order and hierarchy underlying so many of Shakespeare's plays, gives the plays of Tagore and Yeats a solid underlying structure of thought. Both were inspired by religion, by politics and by social revolutions in their respective countries. Many parallels in the political climate of India and Ireland are seen. Political domination is one of the main waves influencing both Yeats and Tagore. They responded to the wave with

enthusiasm, vigour and zeal. Thus although they lack the human appeal of the tragedy of some great modern prose dramatists like Ibsen ane Chekhov their plays embody a doctrine with a great deal of soul and with a beautiful intel lectual coherence, but they are lacking, for the ordinary man, in body and heart. The ideas are beautiful but do not have the vigour of action. A system of some sort will be squeezed out of the poems and plays : both write plays whose interest does not lie in plot or character but in the exposition and working out of some idea—and that a beautiful one.

Yeats gave unequivocal attention to writing plays for the Abbey Theatre, which was so dear to his heart. Tagore, on the other hand, contented himself with occasional informal presentation of his plays : he was connected with no organised theatre. Yeats tells us how he came to write The Countess Cathleen (1892), his first poetic play, in which he represents the Irish peasents' ignorance and superstition. He aimed at simplicity, discarded the romantic trappings of the theatre, and wanted pompous rhetoric to be replaced by poetry composed of words used in common speech. Yeats was an experimenter, trying to fashion a new poetic drama which depended on music, simple stage effects, masks, symbolic backgrounds, and above all the lively speec of his countrymen fashioned into poetry of lyrical beauty. Tagore was less of a pioneer, taking his technique from the Elizabethans, Milton and Ibsen, and the folk play of Bengal. But they hand in common an interest in symbolism. Later on, Yeats derived his ideas from Hindu thought, the Cabbala, Neo-Platonism, Rosicrucianism, Swedenborg and modern philosophy, while Tagore sought material in the epics and the Jatras for his 'lilas', such as the Cycle of Spring, Red Oleanders, Prakritir Pratishodha, Valmike Pratibha and Kal Mrigaya, all indigenous to the core, Tagore's and Yeats's

excursions into these strange realms of thought led them to produce dramas in which the characters dream but rately act. Their dramatic canvas is merely a vague enchanted land in which their characters see the world through 'magic casements.' It is not without significance that Tagore as a boy at Brighton College evinced great interest in Moore's Irish Melodies.

Yeats's first play 'The Countess Cathleen' at first provoked controversy. The first night of Synge's 'The Playboy of the Western World' is characteristic of the struggle that these originators of the movement had to face. The Irish people were reluctant to see their own stories transformed by the imagination of the dramatist on the stage; while the audience in Bengal welcomed the dramatisation of stories living in their memory.

Yeats's dramatic career can be divided into four periods the first covers 'The Countess Cathleen (1892)' and 'The Land of Heart's Desire' (1894). His two prose plays Cathleen Ni' Houlihan (1902) and 'The Pot of Broth' (1904) preceded the next verse play, 'The King's Threshold' (1904) which can be considered the beginning of the second period. He continued his cycle of heroic plays — on 'Baile's Strand' (1904) and 'Deirdre' (1907), plays closely following the Greek technique of drama. Then came 'Green Helmet' (1910), The 'Shadowy Waters' (1911), 'The Hour Glass' (1914) which is linked with an earlier play, where 'There is nothing' or, in its later form' 'The Unicorn from the Stars' (1908). During the third period he wrote plays in the Noh technique. To the post-Noh period belong his five plays, 'A full Moon in March' (1935), 'The King of the Great Clock Tower' (1935), 'The Herne's Egg' (1938), :Purgatory' (1939) and 'The Death of Cuchulain' (1939).

His first play, 'The Countess Cathleen,' based on a folk-story, is a parable comparable to the sacrifice of Alcestis. He treats the parable in a way that illumines human relations in their moral aspects. It is his conception of the growth of love from the particular to the general that finds treatment here.

The scene of this play is laid in the Ireland of olden times. The country is suffering from famine. Two demons disguised as merchants wander about the country to buy souls for bread. Shemus Rua, a peasant, and his son Teigne, are enthusiastic about this bartering of souls. Countess Cathleen, full of the milk of human kindness, intercedes and offers to buy off the souls at the terrible price of her own. But the Demon merchants are defeated by God's mercy, and she is saved. The Ange announces :

> And she is passing to the floor of peace,
> And Mary of the Seven Times Wounded Heart
> Has kissed her lips, and the long blessed hair
> has fallen on her face.

Aleel, the poet and lover of Cathleen, sings the epigraph while Oona, representing Ireland, mourns the loss of Cathleen to the material world. The play belongs to the Morality genre but it transcends the interest of mere folklore in its presentation of beauty and love, if not by strong characterisation. The first production of this play was vehemently opposed because the audience considered the sale of souls a blasphemy. The play is unrealistic and allegorical.

To this class of plays of the countryside and peasantry also belong 'The land of Heart's Desire,' 'Cathleen Ni Houlihan' and 'The Pot of Broth.' 'The Land of Heart's Desire' is once again symobolic : the characters of two different worlds are

related the world of ordinary Irish men and women, and the world of the Sidhe, the Fairies. He depicts a struggle for the soul of Mary Bruin between Father Hart, the priest, and her husband, Shawn Bruin, on the one hand, and a Fairy child on the other. In this conflict the Fairy child, the immortal, wins. In its allegory and its theme, the liberation of the soul, the play bears some resemblance to Tagore's 'The Post Office, — a play once performed in London by the Irish players. 'The Shadowy Waters' is another play written under the spell of symbolism conceived with " sky, sea and cloud " as its characters. Yeats's thought gets lost in ' the shimmering delight ' of words and to him it is more a ritual than a human story. It recalls Tagore's 'Chitra' in its use of the dream : Forgael dreams of Dectora Arjuna of Chitra. In this dream technique lies the enchantment of the plays, which to use Wilson Knight's reference to Shakespeare, become an expanded metaphor. The persons ultimately are not human at all, but purely symbols of a poetic vision.

" The King's Threshold " dramatises the poet's desire to restore the rights of pure art. The character who symbolises art resorts to the Indian practice of starving on the king's doorstep—what we know as *dharna*. The play in technique points towards Yeats's dramatisation of the love story of Deirdre in the Greek style.

Yeats's symbolism becomes more and more obtrusive in the plays written in the style of the Japanese Noh drama. Noh had its impact on the English drama of the first decade of the twentieth century. The intellectual content of drama had been gradually swallowed up by an increasing sentimentalism. " Naturalness " in the sense of photographic realism, insensibility to the qualities of the spoken word, the reduction of the visual significance of what happens on the stage,

are the outstanding characteristics of the realistic prose drama. The Noh plays of Japan, which were introduced to the London audiences as early as 1900, excited Yeats's imagination. He looked upon the Japanese Noh scene with eyes lifted from the dry land of contemporary prose drama and wrote a number of plays in that manner.

"I am going to Asia for a stage convention, for more formal faces, for a chorus that has no part in the action . . . , as a mask will enable me to substitute for the face of some commonplace player the fine invention of a sculptor, and to bring the audience close enough to the play to hear every inflection of the voice."

Yeats's characters like some of Tagore's belong to the world of mythology. A return to the people implied to Yeats a return to myths and sagas. In his play he creates a world of heroism and the aristocratic virtues though in some later plays he creates situations which he tries to imbue with universal appeal. But his success was very limited. His interest in symbolism and myths brings him close to his Indian friend, Tagore.

Yeats admired Tagore greatly, and they knew each other's work well. The symbolism in their plays is common ground, but it is not easy to point to any more specific mutual influence. Tagore in all his work continued the Indian tradition; whereas it is difficult to say of Yeats, except in his early work, that he belonged to any tradition or school.

Yeats and Tagore shared more or less the same intellectual climate. Yeats's work in particular his plays of the final period, show an interest in mysticism and symbolism. Tagore lived a full life, though his works invariably uphold the ideal of self—abnegation; while Yeats's writing is

somewhat less other worldly. "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" gives expression to his full enjoyment of this world. While Yeats worked for years to establish the Abbey Theatre, Tagore was the first in modern India to produce work of high literary merit for the theatre.

Tagore's predilection for drama had first appeared in his poetry: a lyrical expression of his feeling for dramatising. Having written a considerable amount of poetry, a novel and essays, he came in 1891 to write his first drama, Nature's Revenge' (Prakritir Pratishodha). 'Chitrangada,' englished as 'Chitra' (1891), 'The Curse at Farewell' (1891) Vaikuntha's Manuscripts'(1891),and 'Raja O Rani',(The King and the Queen) (1891). Then came a series of plays, Karna and Kunti' (1899), 'A sojourn in Hell (Narak Bas), Sati, Lakshmi's Testing'(1897) 'Gandhari's Prayer' (undated but not later than 1897). Then after a spell, he wrote 'Autumn Festival' (1901), 'Atonement' (1909),'Raja or the king of the Dark chamber,'(1910), The Post Office' (1912). In 1914 came 'Phalguni' (The Cycle of Spring), 'Muktadhara' (The Free Current) (1922) and 'Red Oleanders' (1923).

'Sanyasi' was first called 'Prakritir Pratishodha' (Nature's Revenge); the poet himself calls it a dramatic poem. The hero is a Sanyasi, a hermit, trying to gain a victory over nature by purging himself of all desires and affections and thereby conquering himself. A little girl brings him back from his communion with the infinite into the world and the bondage of human affection. On this he realises: "I am free from the bodliess chain of the Way. I am free among things and forms and purpose. The finite is the true infinite, and love knows its birth."

The play was first written as a dramatic poem on the sea beach of Karwar, which is ideally suited for the imaginative creation of a hermit: an expression of the poet's beautiful

idea that in the light of love, all limits are merged in the limitless. It starts with a prologue-like pronouncement of the main character, the Sanyasi, who is "free of fear and desires. When mist has vanished, and my reason shines pure and bright, let me go into the kingdom of lies, and sit upon its heart, untouched and unmoved." In the "kingdom of lies" he comes into contact with the village elder Ananga and two women students, each symbolising an attitude, the rustics quite contented with their humdrum life and the students seeking knowledge. Vasanti, Raghu's daughter, presumably an untouchable, is asked to keep away from the temple road. She approaches the Sanyasi, who knows the real definition of pollution — "only he is pure who has washed away the world from his mind." She disturbs the hermit who goes about "seeking my lost world back." The play, serious in content, has also a comic situation in a character being carried as a corpse while he is asleep.

'Sanyasi' lacks the vigour of great drama but it is a little Indian world in miniature. Tagore knows the heart of our women and our men in the villages. It contains passages of luxuriant description of nature : a treat from Tagore the poet. He considered Sanyasi an "introduction to the whole of my future literary work." The play's various strata of life, and the poet's inability to draw characters in the round is manifest. Two flower girls are an exception : they are a worthy product of Tagore's poetic genius.

Chitrangada' (1891) is full of lyrical quality. "All my plays except 'Chitra' were written in winter. In that season lyrical fervour is apt to grow cold, and one gets the leisure to write drama." His lyrical fervour seems to have worked under full pressure. The theme has the authority of the 'Mahabharata.' Chitra, the only daughter of Chitravahana, is

brought up to be the ruler of the Kingdom and is trained as a chieftain. But she has heard of Arjuna, one of the Pandavas. She longs to win his heart, stand by his side as a comrade, drive the fieree horses of his war chariot, accompany him in the chase, keep guard at night at the entrance of his tent and help him in all the duties of a Kshtriya, rescuing the weak, and meting out justice where it is due. Her idol of the heart meets her, the women in the huntress comes to the surface as elemental as Miranda when she met Ferdinand : a situation full of bliss and ecstatic joy. The theme is slight but the poet's idea of true love finds full expression.

The play has a severaly limited cast : two Gods, Madana (Eros), and Vasanta (Lycoris), Chitra; the daughter of the King of Manipur, and Arjuna, now living as a hermit. The play starts with a conversation between the mortal Chitra and the immortal Madana. We get a peep into the heart of Chitra at once : ' I know no feminine wiles for winning hearts. My hands are strong to bend the bow, but I have never learnt Cupid's archery, the play of eyes.'' In that enchanted woodland, her innocence spreads like a sweet fragrance. Arjuna has already dreamt about her. His dream comes true. Not knowing who he is, she asks, " Have you heard of the greatest name of that far-famed house (of Kurus)? '' Arjuna longs to hear his own story from his beloved. The love-talk grows in intensity. Arjuna reveals himself, and the flame of love burns bright in the heart of Chitra. Chitra describes her passionate feelings in intense words : " The southern breeze caressed me to sleep. From the flowering Malati bower overhead silent kisses dropped over my body. On my hair, my breast, my feet, each flower chose a bed to lie on . . .'' Thus in words of poetic glory the action of the play gets lost. Vasanta and Madana are two beautiful divine characters of the other world common to

Indian mythology, whose function is to bring the lovers together. Chitra's parting words are full of pathos :

"Take to your home what is abiding and strong. Leave the little wild flower where it was born ; leave it beautifully to die at the day's end among all fading blossoms and decaying leaves. Do not take it to your palace hall to fling it on the stony floor which knows to pity for things that fade and are forgotten."

The verse is in the good romantic tradition. Arjuna's words, "the sound of prayer-bells stealing upon the evening air across the silent trees", suggest the endurance of love. The lovers get nearer the heart of each other, and Arjuna asks "something that can last longer than pleasure, that can endure even through suffering." Like a "thirsty bee" he is prepared to "suck honey of this body flower." Arjuna's fight against the robbers, and his departure from Chitra who nurtures his babe in her womb to become a second Arjuna, contribute an element of drama.

The play's atmosphere is of fragrance emanating from a garden full of sweet flowers. Everything is hazy but the conception of love is clear. "Domes and towers and garden trees look vague and shadowy, and the dull moan of the sea comes fitfully through the silence of sleep."

'Raja,' translated as 'The King of the Dark Chamber' (1910) was translated into English by Kshitish Chandra Sen. On the authority of Edward Thompson we have it that the play has lost and gained in translation. "The gain is by the partial omission of bands of strolling singers who clutter up the action with an aimless, almost imbecile rivalry, and in the arrangement of scenes with greater compactness." The loss

he finds is in the style of the translator. The style is secondary as far as the dramatic merits are concerned. The play has been produced in Germany and in Paris in 1922, and in Bengal with fair success.

The King is no other than God who "wants to demonstrate the futility and inferiority of outer beauty and grandeur. The vanity of his powers has made him discard all outer embellishments from his limbs." The poet makes an attempt at dramatising the dealings of God with the human heart—the Daharakasa. The "Hound of Heaven" makes a vigorous search.

The play is highly symbolic, conceived truly in the manner of Tagore. It starts off with a few wayfarers entering the kingdom from the Earth. The poet dilates on the contrasts between these two kingdoms—the ways of the Earth as crooked and perilous; the mortal kinds are vainglorious. The wayfarers meet a grandfather with a jolly band of Have Nothings; the grandfather symbolises the Guru who interprets the Ways of God to men. His song; "We are all kings in the kingdom of our king," the king suggesting pure spirits, surprises his disciples. He tells the wayfarers, "With a mere breath you can blow out the flame which a lamp inherits from the sun, but if all the world blow upon the sun itself its effulgence remains undimmed and unimpaired as before." Thus the grandfather acts as a choric character, emphasising the main theme of the play, the inward illumination of God. The theme is reiterated in songs here and there:

My beloved is ever in my heart;
That is why I see him everywhere.
He is in the pupils of my eyes;
That is why I see him everywhere.

The introduction of the false king with all the paraphernalia of the true king who is invisible reinstates the contrast between the false and the true. Incidentally we get the poet's idea on true and false kingship. As with Masefield, the Mad Friend seems to be the favourite of Tagore. His role is also choric in character; he represents the soul mad after God: "Oh, I roam and wander through woods and fields and nameless lands—never caring to turn my vagbond's back!"

The other symbolic characters are the Queen, Sudarshana and her maid of honour, Surangama. Sudarshana represents the soul, while the maid stands for peace. The king meets the individual soul only in the dark chamber of the heart. We also meet a number of the kings of the earth—kings of Kanchi Avanti and Koshala, and ultimately the scene is transferred to the kingdom of the King. All these counterfeit kings are defeated by the King of Kings in a battle, and the rest of the play treats of the passage of the soul into the light. Sudarshana's last words are:

> Before I go, let me bow at the feet of my
> Lord of Darkness, my cruel, my terrible,
> my peerless one!

The play is in nineteen parts and for one without a knowledge of the symbolic background appears disjointed. The conception is highly metaphorical, although the characters look "real". It is reminiscent of *Brand* or *Peer Gynt*, but without the economy exercised by Ibsen. There is much in the play that could be reduced without material loss.

"The Post Office" (1912) is also highly symbolic. Yeats on seeing it produced in London wrote: "When this little play was performed in London a year ago by the Irish players, some friends of mine discovered much detailed allegory, the

Headman being one principle of social life, the Curdseller or Gaffar another ; but the meaning is less intellectual, more emotional and simple. The deliverance sought and won by the dying child is the same deliverance which rose before his imagination. But unlike "the King of the Dark Chamber," it is tautly constructed.

The central character of the play is Amal, an orphan child adopted by Madhav. Madhav is obseesed with material wealth but later seems to be redeemed by this little boy. Amal is everything to him. The physician advises that the boy should be kept strictly within doors. Madhav represents " wordly prosperity " and Amal " a pure and stainless one." Gaffar, in whom Tagore symbolises the poet, comes to make friends with the child. There are other characters—a Dairy-man, a Watchman, a village Headman, and the King's Herald, who come into contact with the pure life symbolised by Amal. The Postman is the bearer of God's gospel. Sudha, daughter of the Flowerseller, comes very close to Amal s heart. Amal wants her to be his sister. In Act II Amal is confined to bed ; Gaffar, disguised as a Fakir, entertains him with stories, and lastly the State Physician, who represents the grace of God, overrules the prescriptions of the Physician and orders all doors and windows to be opened. But Amal seeks deliverance in death.

The aim of the dramatist is " to visualise a child pining for freedom and the world anxious to keep it in bonds." He is successful in achieving this aim, but the action is crowded. The central character Amal is too young to support the weight of the other characters. The dialogue is simple but at times obscure. Yeats's comment that the play conveys to the right audience emotion and peace is significant.

At this period, the poet's imagination turned towards the masque style. " Autumn Festival " (1908) and 'Phalguni'

(The Cycle of of Spring) (1914) are conceived in the fashion of Milton's 'Comus' or Robert Bridges's "Prometheus the Fire Giver" and "Demeter." In Tagore's "Autumn Festival" bands of revellers take the place of the chorus and are intoxicated with songs. Thakurdada is the chief of them and is the poet's mouthpiece. Thakurdada represents wisdom while the youths rebel against it. It is interesting as a new experiment. Tagore worked on it again and renamed it "Repayment of Debt." "Phalguni" was acted in 1916 in the countryard of the Jorosanko house to raise funds for a famine. The play has an introduction, which makes it undramatic. The characters of the prelude refer to a famine in Nagapatam. The nature of the play cannot be described better than in the words of a character:

> The play of spring in its nature is the counter-part of the play of Youth in our lives. It is simply from the lyrical drama of the world poet that I have stolen this plot.

The play has all the qualities of a masque in the sense in which the Elizabethans used the term. But the framework of the masque is too thin to contain his spiritual symbolism, Thakurdada, the hero-figure, speaks lines full of individual imagery. Images drawn from nature flit across the stage: butterflies, the crown of Age, the mantle of the Wayfarer, a crowd of new leaves are scattered throughout the dramatic poem. One smells a sweet fragrance of the air of Phalguni blowing across the stage, but one is likely to agree with Banerjee's criticism: "The conception is thin and the execution just tolerable."[7] One returns to the play for its lyrics in a limpid style. It has the freshness and charm of some of Gordon Bottomley's choric plays based on Scottish mythology.

'Malini'' (1919), one of his more tautly constructed plays in prose, deals with the unreasonable demand of the

Brahmins for the banishment of Malini, the daughter of a king. The play is simple, with no underplot, but a feeble rebellion. Malini, the central character, is quite convincing. The scene in which by her simple appearance she wins over the Brahmins clamouring for her banishment is ridiculous. The other characters, the Queen, Supriya, and the man who abandons his lifelong convictions, are well drawn. The dramatist leaves us puzzled when Malini pleads for the man who has killed her mother. To him Malini symbolises two impulses—or perhaps an ideal and an impulse, the life preached by Gautama and the other life of love and friendship. It is a beautiful play, one of the peaks of Tagore's achievement. His imagery is evocative. " The moon has just come out of those clouds. Great peace is in the sky. It seems to gather all the world in its arms, under the fold of one vast moonlight."

'Sacrifice' (1891) is another prose tragedy which deals powerfully with a traditional belief of the Hindus—the belief that human sacrifice should be offered to placate the Goddess of War. The play is dedicated to those who stood bravely against this ancient custom.

Jaisingh, the son of Raghupati, is a brave soul who stabs himself in the presence of the Goddess in the temple at Tippera. His death "killed the falsehood that sucks the lifeblood of man." The death is a sacrifice, a redemption through death. The arguments for and against human sacrifice are well presented : Raghupati argues for the laws laid down in the scriptures, against King Govinda, who has seen Mother Kali asking him to forbid the spilling of blood. There is no underplot to take the audience away from the main theme, and the dialogue is lucid. Raghupati, who symbolises the ancient lord speaks with vehmence :" . . . "The shadows of evil have thickened. The King's throne is raising its

insolent head above the temple altar. Ye Gods of these degenerate days, are ye ready to obey the King's laws with bowed heads, fawning upon him like his courtiers? Have only men and demons combined to usurp God's dominion in this world, and is Heaven powerless to defend its honour? But there remain the Brahmins, though the Gods be absent, and the King's throne will supply fuel to the sacrificial fire of their anger."

The dramatist maintains the intensity of tragedy; the play fully represents Tagore's genius. We see that the dramatist in Tagore is taking the place of the poet,

"The King and the Queen" (1891) is another play which fully displays Tagore's tragic genius. It maintains coherence in spite of many sub-plots. The play starts in the palace garden with the king Vikram and Queen Sumitra re-living their days of love. They are interrupted by Devadatta, to discuss the starvation of the people, and the Queen shows her determination to save them. The audience is given a charming picture of Ila, the daughter of the Chief of Trichur, and her devotion to Kumarasen. Other highlights of the play are scenes between the King and the Queen of Kashmir and a dialogue between the fugitive Kumarasen and the Raja of Trichur.

Tagore's women, Sumitra and Ila are lifelike. Edward Thompson suspects Ibsen's influence. It may be that Renaissance Bengal had been exposed to the fresh breeze from Scandinavia, but Tagore's women are truly Indian. In Sumitra he portrays and ideal wife, and in Ila a sincere love. The play is full of marmoreal prose: "I remember the eager embrace of your love; when the morning broke we had to part, and your unwilling steps, heavy with languor, that stole you away from me." Passion is often compared to the red

flames of hell-fire. Ila's words are full of poignancy: "If he go away for ever, and the forest shadows keep their ancient watch for the love-meeting that remains eternally unfulfilled! King, do not take me away — leave me for him who has left me to find me again."

Once again the action of the play is strangled in words.

"Karna and Kunti" (1899) is a play that takes on that tautness and pregnancy that come with condensation of a passionate action. Kunti, who had thrown away the baby Karna born before her wedding, realises her inhumanity, and Karna the brave warrior shows his magnanimity. Karna's tragedy has immense potentialities. Tagore dramatises one possible line of development. Karna and Kunti stand out of the cold printed page as we listen to their dialogue:

Karna: The gloom of evening spreads over earth the silence rests on the water, and your voice leads me back to some primal world of infancy lost in twilight consciousness.

Kunti is very human; she repents of her weakness. She tells her son, who refuses to take his place as the eldest of the Pandavas: "You are great, my son! How God's punishment invisible grows from a tiny seed to a giant life!" Karna's parting words must have broken her heart: "On the night of my birth you left me naked and unnamed to disgrace; leave me once again without pity to the calm expectation of defeat and death!"

"Mukta-Dhara" is a mountain spring whose waters running down the slopes of Uttarakut should irrigate the plains of Shivatarai. The people of Shivatarai are the subjects of the King of the Uttarakut. On the waters of the Mukta-Dhara, the prosperity of the people of Shivatarai depends. Bibhuti;

a royal engineer making use of modern science and conscripted labour, builds a dam. He erects a mighty engine tower, soaring above the temple of Shiva on a mountain peak. The crown Prince Abhijit has sympathy for the people of Shiva-tarai and protests against Bibhuti's scientific achievement. There is a character contrast between Bibhuti and the prince. The prince is a lover of freedom, a democrat at heart. The play gains emotional intensity when we learn that the prince is only a foundling found near the source of Mukta-Dhara. His first cry was associated with the source of the spring. He is determined to break the dam and obtain a free flow of water. He is able to achieve his aim, but his body is carried away by the flood to reunite him with Mukta-Dhara.

The play's opening is magnificent ; the chanting of the mantras in honour of the dam is as impressive as the opening of *Murder in the Cathedral* by the chorus of the hysterical women. Many of Tagore's basic ideas are expressed : his aversion to imperialism, his deep distrust of the soulless achievements of science, his hatred of politics of all sorts. A pageant of humanity passes before the eyes of the audience. The chant interspersed throughout the play is choric in character and it is very impressive. Tagore also makes use of a Messenger, a device common in Elizabethan drama. In these days of hectic dam building, Mukta-Dhara has topical significance.

" Natir Puja " (Dance-Worship) is based on a Buddhist legend related in Rajendralal Mitra's, *The Samskrit Buddhist Literature of Nepal* (1882), and is comparatively free from symbolism. Tagore's skill is shown in the character of Srimati, the Palace Dancer, and her simple devotion to Lord Buddha, which leads her to martyrdom. Other details about King Bimbisara and his son Ajatasatru are lost sight of as we become interested in the heroine. Srimati the Nati

comes alive as she begins to dance in the shrine on the Vasanta Purnima day, the birthday of the Buddha. All the angry eyes watch her as she takes off her gorgeous dress one after another and is left only with the simple attire of a Bhikshuni. She chants in ecstasy : " My refugee is in the Buddha ! My refugee is in the Dhamma ! My refugee is in the Sangha ! "

The play has shed all symbolic mist. The dramatist clearly sets forth his view of religion, that the worship of the Divine is not the monopoly of anyone ; it transcends caste, creed and hierarchy. Tagore's familiar idea that God lives with the lowest, last and least finds dramatic expression.

" Chandalika " is playlet depicting the conflict between the lower form of magic and the higher order, Sadhana, will power, achieved by Tapasya. Ananda, a disciple of the Lord Buddha, bewitches the heart of prakriti, a beautiful Chandalini. She asks her mother, a magician, to work a spell on Ananda and bring him to her bosom. In this process the mother dies, Ananda comes but goes out without being defiled, and the lustful Prakriti is chastened.

The two characters, the Mother and Prakriti, are well drawn. The play is a duologue between mother and daughter about the conduct of Bhikshus.

Yeats and Tagore had many common ideas and wrote poems and plays to express them. Ireland and India, politically backward at the time, inspired them. Yeats in his use of the Cuchulain myths and Tagore in the more familiar material from epics and Buddhist legend intended to shape the opinion of the people. Tagore was the one modern Indian dramatist to invade the London stage, and his charm and symbolism captivated the hearts of Yeats and his friends.

Tagore like Yeats in the early plays exploits characteristics that are genuinely native of his soil. Yeats and Tagore express beautiful ideas, but their medium may be described as archaic and undramatic. They try to come to grips with the actualities of life but do not reduce the distance between the stage and the audience. The Kings and Queens who flit across Tagore's stage belong to the remote past.

Tagore'e plays more than Yeats's suffer from certain conventions of drama. The playwright borrowing his material from an epic, for instance, should eliminate the episodes and anecdotes that do not help to push the plot forward and knit it together. Some of Tagore's plays modelled on the five act structure of an Elizabethan play are full of dawdlings and lack pure dramatic construction. Tagore's passion for digressions, for starting hares and for discussing ideas on the stage, judged by classical standards is anti-dramatic. His later plays shed these defects but have little relevance to modern life.

It is striking that Tagore owes very little to the classical Indian drama. His models are all taken from modern Europe. This fact, and their use of mythological material, largely account for the similar atmosphere he and Yeats create on the stage. But their aims were very different. Tagore is primarily interested in ideas and seems to concern himself little with technique. Yeats will be remembered mainly as a technical innovator, but this is because his ideas, of a return to primal innocence and the aristocratic virtues, are so unacceptable to the modern audience. Though his dramatic technique was outdated, Tagore was in his ideas a modern man.

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TAGORE THE STORY-TELLER

> " And only the Master shall praise us, and only the Master shall blame ; And no one shall work for money, and no one shall work for fame. But each for the joy of the working, and each, in his separate star, Shall draw the Thing as he sees It for the God of Things as they are ! "

L'Envoi to *The Seven Seas*

Not so much " the Thing as he sees It "—unless it be the thing that happens—as the Man and the Woman. Tagore, born into one of the ages when " the perfectability of man " was canvassed and independance of man was sought, reacted against it, as did D. H. Lawrence who remarked, " The perfectibility of Man ! Ah heaven, what a dreary theme ! " He would have readily agreed with Pharaoh Ahkenaton, in his statement :

> The raw fact of life is that mankind is just a little lower than the angels, and the conventions are based on the fact in order tha men may become angels. But if you begin by the convention that men are angels they will assuredly become bigger beasts than ever.

Tagore, who studied life as an artist, was born into the Bengal of luxuriant vegetation, of fields, of incredible lushness and vast stretches of meadows of birds of different colours and of rivers of steady flow which swell during the rain. He knew

the Himalayas like the palm of his hand and they became very dear to the heart of his passionate delight. He was born to a language enriched by Sanskrit and contributed to the existing spectacle of a national literature in the making. The Bengali Renaissance turned to literature rather late, and developed pretty rapidly. It began with Toru Dutt, and reached its peak in the writings of Rabindranath Tagore. It is perhaps necessary to emphasise right at the beginning that the Bengali Renaissance is a very noteworthy phenomenon in the history of India's letters. It is however not unique, for similar developments took place in most of the linguistic areas of the country; but it was the earliest, and by far the most productive and dynamic. Tagore is its greatest literary figure and has been called "India's greatest poet since Kalidasa." Although, one can dispute this claim, Tagore has left models in all branches of literature: essay, novel, short story, plays and poems and songs which are set to music and sung. In contributing to literature, he does not stand entirely alone, and two novelists, Bankim Chandra and Sarat Chandra are known in translation everywhere in India. Tagore's music is highly and universally esteemed in Bengal. Certainly, I am not competent to determine how the vitality of speech rhythm is conveyed in a musical setting. His painting is remarkable but controversial. He did not write much in English himself, but he took part with others in the translation of several of his works.

It was his business to serve the "God of Things as They are" and of course he saw them with a brilliantly understanding eye.

Like most short story writers, he concerns himself with the topics and incidents of everyday. He was vividly aware of the complex nature of man freely, the infidelity of Loken Babu to his sick wife is heightened by the cry of birds in

" In the Night " ; the chores of an editor's life which come in the way of his attending on his only daughter in " The Editor"; the amorous husband of Giribala, who going after actresses, but finding his own wife on the stage to his dismay, are stories built round common incidents in the lives of common men. Tagore concerns himself with human relations. Resplendent world of Badshah is contrasted with that of the modern world in " Hungry Stones." As in Yeats, the court poet is a common figure in Tagore too. He becomes the central character in " Vijaya", enters into a contest of learning, loses the contest and dies hoping that the prince whom he had entertained with his verses will honour him in death. "In this world there is no worse nuisance than a boy at the age of fourteen. He is neither ornamental nor useful. It is impossible to shower affection on him as on a smaller boy, and he is always getting in the way." These are the thoughts of the Mother of three children, when Bhatic Chakravarti, the ring-leader among the boys of the village goes to live in the city and his inability to adjust to the new surroundings form the theme of " The Home-Coming." Tagore is interested in the satire of institutions and men. " The Kingdom of Cards" deals with social satire, while " The Babus of Nayanjore" exposes a boastful zamindar of not much substance, but of plenty of arrogance, which came in the way of the marriage of his grand daughter, Kusum. The element of surprise, which is one of the features of a short story is kept up in the visit of Chota Lal Sahib who makes up his mind to marry Kusum. The element of the " comic" bordering on farce is introduced in " Alive or Dead", in which a widow presumed to be dead is taken to cremation ground, comes to life, everyone treats her as a ghost and in disgust she commits suicide. The comic aspect of human nature interested Tagore. He as an artist was interested in caste distinctions, high and low : the defects of the arranged marriages, the harm of child

marriage form the milieu of some of Tagore's stories. The world of his stories is the world of zamindars, jahgirdars, poor and helpless women, poets and musicians, young and old. His poets are men of eloquence, his youngmen are adventurous, while his women need pity as they are typical Indian women of the early century. Some of these stories have clever incidents woven into them. He matures as a short story writer in "Cabulliwallah", he introduces a narrator; the main character is Mini, a little girl of great charm and wit. Around her is built a very human story. Mini, out of fun, calls for Cabulliwallah wearing the loose, soiled clothes of a hawker : a turban on his head and a box of grapes in his hand. When Cabulliwallah makes his appearance the child overcome by fear, perhaps thinking that in his bag were two or three children like herself, shuns him. But from this moment till Mini grows up to go to her father-in-law's house, a firm and pure friendship between her and Cabulliwallah is established. The word, "Father-in law" was also euphemism for prison. Cabulliwallah, unfortunately goes to this place, as he was involved in a brawl, returns straight from the prison after years first to see Mini, the father knowing the antecedents, asks him that it is not possible as there is ceremony in the house. He asks the narrator : "May I not see the little one, Sir, for a moment?" He had a small gift for Mini, with considerable amount of difficulty over-ruling all objections of a bride being presented to a stranger, Mini arrives and she is now ready to go to her father-in-law. The sight makes Rahman the Cabulliwallah sad and reminiscential and reminds him of his own daughter who must have reached marrigeable age.

It is a beautiful story of character and situation. The pen portraits, of the child, the sophisticated behaviour of the narrator and the simple manner of Rahman stand out distinctly. There is room for sentiment, but it does not mar

the beauty of the story. The most suggestive in Tagore's repetoire story is "Subha" : 'Subha lacked speech, she did not lack a pair of large dark eyes, shaded with long lashes; and her lips trembled like a leaf in response to any thought that arose in her mind." Her constant companions were two cows, Sarbbashi and Panguli, the dumb animals consoled her when she was hurt. When she grew up, the thought of her marriage filled her parents. She was taken to Calcutta and married and in less than ten days everyone knew that she was dumb. The story teller describes the predicament thus . . . " It was not her fault, for she deceived no one. Her eyes told them everything, though no one understood her . . . . In her silent heart there sounded an endless, voiceless weeping, which only the Searcher of Hearts could hear." Sentimental as "Subha" is, one may wonder whether, if people would look into themselves, and realise Subha's feelings in her strange predicament. The art of story telling comes to the poet spontaneously and "Cabulliwallah" and "Subha" mark the culmination of great Maytide, making for spring blossoms in the first novel entitled *Eyesore*. The stories mentioned so far are the very early ones. But *Eyesore* is not a good example of the short story writer becoming a novelist. We do not enjoy the blossom.

From the short stories, if one starts reading *Eyesore* and The *Wreck* one feels that there is a definite falling off. The situations are boring and monotonous. All the little details around widowed mother Raja Lakshmi lack verisimilitude. The story deals with the mother's desire that Mahendra should marry Vinodini, his refusal and the girl soon becoming a widow, Mahendra loves Asha, Asha and Vinodini, become friends and call each other " Eyesore." Vinodini's guile and other complications are cleverly noted, Vinodini sets up Mahendra against Vihari who is in love with Asha ; their

letters being intercepted, ultimately Vinodini becomes a sister of Mercy in Vihari's home of service ; the details are tedious to read. It is difficult to untangle the plot. All the remarks of psychological import which the author digs out of his characters' armpits and other dark places in the name of verisimilitude become incredible. The plot recalls that of *Poison Tree* by Bankim Chandra ; inadvertently the title is mentioned by Vinodini. Both share a common theme a widow as heroine. One has little to find fault with the style which is dramatic but one feels so strongly that the writer lacks imagination in constructing the plot. It is not enough to create four characters—Mother and son and aunt and son determined to win their way—but one needs a credible framework in which they move and act. A work of art must be a faithful reflection of what the artist sees. Analysis and explanation are a matter of half-truths at the remove from the original. However Annapurna, Khasi and Mahendra are pointers to characters in *Gora*.

Between *Eyesore* and *Gora* is another novel ; its story is also botched. Tagore does not seem to think the creation of character needs necessarily be the first consideration in writing a novel. He portrays customs and manners against a background of actual happenings of two marriage parties in *The Wreck* (Nauka Dubi) which is based on a dilemma of mistaken identity resulting in an exchange of wives. The story is a complicated and a tedious one, the young hero Ramesh, a Brahmin student visits the house of his friend, Jogindra of Brahmo faith and falls in love with Hemnalini. A Brahmin and Brahmo cannot marry; but they are main lovers. Ramesh's father forces him to marry the girl of his choice. The marriage party travelling in a boat is drowned. This starts the first accident, Ramesh swims, reaches an island in the middle of the srteam. When he recovers, he finds himself next to a girl in bridal robes and takes her to be his prospective wife,

but actually the girl belongs to another marriage party whose boat is also wrecked. The very outline of the novel suggests artificiality as a great deal depends on coincidence. Tagore likes life in all its movement and the rhythm he seeks first to capture. But in *The Wreck*, he seems to have missed it. In all innocence Ramesh takes the girl to be his wife, Kamala as she is called, she in turn takes him to be her husband. He is assailed by doubts and conventions of the society. "How could he establish his innocence? Even if he could prove himself guiltless, society would draw up, as it was her skirts formed contact with him, and the result would be so desastrous for Kamala." Realism we feel, might have been achieved without so much detail. The truth is discovered after a long time. Ramesh on getting the details of her life, writes to Nalinaksha, her true husband who does not respond. Ramesh takes Kamala to Calcutta and gets her admitted to a school stating that she is his wife; but he does not forget Hemnalini; their marriage is fixed. More complications are let into the novel. Akshay, another competitor for Hemnalini's hand scandalises Ramesh and his relations with Kamala. Kamala arrives a day before the marriage and it is postponed and no reason is given to Hemnalini and her father. All this reads like a situation in a detective fiction. Hemnalini's brother Jogindra and Akshay meet Ramesh and tell him that they know all about his affair with Kamala. Ramesh accompanied by Kamala gets into a boat and starts for Banaras. But Akshay does not leave them, he pursues them, Ramesh escapes unnoticed. Poor Kamala is stranded, another youngman called Umesh helps Kamala on her boat journey. She still does not know that Ramesh is not her husband and that this is a big flaw in a novel of human relations. Another new character Trailokya Chakravarti is introduced, Kamala and Ramesh stay with him in Ghazipur. More surprise awaits the reader and the situation calls for willing suspension of

disbelief. Chakravarti and his wife take Ramesh and Kamala to be husband and wife but wonder why they do not live like married couple. There is estrangement, the narrative takes Ramesh to Calcutta from where he writes a long letter to Hemnalini explaining the circumstances under which fate brought him and Kamala together. With this letter, he goes in search of Hemnalini, finds her and her father had gone to Banaras with Nalinaksha, a Brahmo and a doctor by profession to live with her mother. The letter setting forth the accidents of his life is seen by Kamala distracted and troubled; she throws away the ring given her by Ramesh into a river and walks on the bank of the river, makes up her mind to become a domestic servant also by accident in Navinkali's house. More and more accidents happen, the story is really contrived. Ramesh in tracing the steps of Kamala imagines that she is drowned. Hemnalini and Jogindra are not lost sight of. Jogindra presses her to marry Akshay. The narrative takes the reader to-and-fro-Kamala-and-Hemnalini. Kamala also goes to Banaras with Navinkali and her sick husband, Nalinaksha, the Brahmo doctor who comes to attend on Navinkali's husband and Kamala instinctively feels that he is her husband, with more of artificial contrivances, Ramesh meets Kamala, Chakravarti plays a part in making Nalinaksha and Kamala meet and Ramesh and Hemnalini marry. The narration is interspersed with author's views on society, marriage and maners. Human beings do feel a desire for surprise and as an artist Tagore portrayed them as enjoying their surprise. One likes to read surprises in a story, too many of them take away the interest. But the readers do not enjoy reading *The Wreck*; a superb compendium of anecdotes.

This brief plot-summary of the complicated plot of about 400 pages makes us feel that Tagore's characters, their thoughts and feelings are subordinated to the pattern he

contemplates. Everything depends on accidents; accidents and coincidences are necessary. But many of them strain one's credibility, the event of an unmarried boy and girl living together for such a long time in the India of nineteen hundred is fantastic. Tagore does not seem to understand his various men! Ramesh is intelligent, gentlemanly. But these qualities are misused Nalinaksha is very curious while Akshay is a villain. Tagore's women are more lively. Hemnalini is good, cheerful but unIndian and Kamala is a dumb animal. As a reformist of a society about to transform itself from that of landlordism into an industrial one, Tagore's intellectual feelings are not worked out well. The struggle, if any, between orthodoxy and progress does not seem to come off. Tagore stresses some of the unIndian characteristics in Hemnalini and his attempts to juxtapose the old and the new are not successful. Although Tagore sees *The Wreck* as significant inarrangements of the material as it arises in the mind of the artist, the work gives the impression of being loosely knit.

Tagore's neatly arranged conclusions about life in *Gora* (1924) are in marked contrast to the irregular flux which registers the thought and speech of his characters in *The Wreck*. It marks the end of the period of his novel writing. The moment was the great Indian national movement, the controversy between religions gave out fire which kindled his enthusiasm. The novel's opening paragraph is characteristic of Tagore's love of rain and cloud. " It was the rainy season in Calcutta; the morning clouds had scattered, and the sky overflowed with clear sunlight." Into this atmosphere is installed Benoy-bhushan, having completed his college education stands musing on the song of a mendicant. The refrain was:

> Into the cage flies the unknown bird,
> It comes I know not whence.

Then he sees an accident involving an old man, Paresh Babu, a Brahmo his niece, Sucharita and her brother, Master Satish Chandra Mukherji travelling in a cab; this is the commencement of their friendship with Binoy. Then the readers are introduced to Gourmohan, briefly called Gora, the Chairman of a group of champions or Orthodoxy. He is tall, nick named Snow Mountain, as he is very fair, made conspicuous in any company because of his physical features, posesses the qualities of a revolutionary and always ready to abuse the Brahmos. Hate and fear between the followers of one sect and another form the basis of the first movement of the novel. Benoy and Gora are contrasted with each other : with Benoy is gentle and tolerant while Gora is a fanatic, always of leonine roaring and does not like his friend being soft on the Brahmos. Gora hates the English and everything connected with them, he thinks that his love for Sucharitra is derived from the observance of English social manners. Anandamoyi, Gora's mother, as the representative of the old order, agrees more with Binoy than with her son. Krishnadayal Babu, her husband is also religious. The novelist says, " He no sooner caught sight of a *sannyasi* than he would sit at his feet in the hope of learning some novel form of religious exercise." He was keen on short act to salvation. He had seen the Sepoy Mutiny. A surprise is built around his character. Towards the end of the novel, it is revealed that Gora was born of Irish parents; his pregnant mother taking refuge in Krishnadayal's house : this is a big flaw in otherwise a good work of art. Gora always quarrels with Sucharita, who does not like his orthodoxy, hates Gora but likes his patriotism. All the characters are intelligent and capable of growth through adventures and understanding.

There is an attempt to discredit the various illusions men always create for themselves, and see the world as it

really is. Although this is an impossible task, but is worth aiming at. Paresh Babu comments: "You want us to go back to the zerana system over again by restricting our expansion within our own community. But I myself think that girls ought to mix with people of all shades of opinion." Gora's brother wants Binoy to marry his daughter Sasi and he wants Gora to intervene; he does not approve of it as he feels that Gora is not orthodox. But Gora is attracted to Sucharita but frightened by his mighty power. The principal character in this complex story is Gora; everything hangs on him, around him many incidents which give a peep into the nature of society are built: Paresh Babu's production of a play in the house of an English magistrate, Binoy as one of the actors getting pally with Lolita, Paresh Babu's daughter. These incidents add another dimension to the novel.

It would be too much of a simplication to allow an account of the novel to stop here. In *Gora*, Tagore lives and breathes for ever. It is an amazingly faithful reflection except for the incident of the birth of Gora remindIng us of the emotional and intellectual life of a man — its creator. His patriotism, dislike of narrow creeds—as the author of the song beginning with "Where the mind is without fear" in *Gitanjali* find echo in a narrative which grips; Gora on his long expedition discovers the real India outside the well-to-do and cultural society of Calcutta. He muses "How divided, how narrow, how weak was this vast expanse of rural India—how supinely unconscious of its own power, how ignorant and indifferent as to its own welfare!" He becomes the mouthpiece of the novelist, he hates purity of external things. He gets involved in a quarrel on Indigo—plantations and courts imprisonment. There is an attack on justice based on status of persons. In his attack on injustice, he has the support of Lolita, who refuses to act in a play for a magistrate who sells

justice. Her courageous act has cast her in a heroic mould. Further complications—attack on Brahmos, Haran's jealousy-all add to the real picture of society in the twenties. The women characters are drawn in the round, Sucharita and Lolita become more and more interested in Gora and Binoy. As the story develops, there is a new character Harimohini who nurses the thought of bringing Binoy under the influence of Brahmo Samaj. Lolita's idea of starting a school, Binoy's offer of marrying Lolita to save her from scandal, Paresh Babu's insistance on his becoming a Brahmo before his marriage, Gora's release from prison and his being asked to save Binoy from losing his caste, all make complicated but interesting reading. The marriage of Hindu and Brahmo takes place after Gora knew about his own birth and this releases him from the clutches of orthodoxy. All this is a slice of life, vanished, music to hear but does not come back again, however much one wished. The passage in the novel to which Tagore devoted much time seems to be the brief epilogue in which Gora meets Anandamoyi, puts his head at her feet and says "Mother, you are my mother! The mother whom I have been wandering about in search of, was all the time sitting in my room at home. You have no caste, you will make no destinction and have no hatred—you are only the image of our welfare! It is you who are India!" Gora learns that he is not merely a Hindu but he belongs to all.

It is the story of Gora's growth, a generation coming to consciousness in a bewilderingly rich India. Each individual —Gora, Binoy, Sucharita, Lolita, Haran and two religions— Hinduism and Brahmo—becomes caught up in the mists of deception and struggles to find his or its way. The Brahmo Samaj and orthodox Hinduism are discussed at great length and the novel is full of discussions. As a novel of character

and situation it stands out and it has its influence on many Bengali novelists[1].

It is a measure of the design of *The Home and the World* that one can read it off as independent stories containing about 280 pages which cover in detail condemnation and intolerance of women claiming equality with men and the place of Indian woman in societyof the early decade. Once again, Tagore's artistic imagination centres on society. The number of his characters is limited: Bimala and her husband a Raja, a man of progressive ideas are the main characters. The story is told through Bimala, who loves no change in her social status. She likes privacy, *purdah*, while her husband wants her to shed all these outdated customs, when she tresspasses these quiet boundaries, she fails. Bimala takes to the National movement or *swadeshi*-symbolising a break with the past she is determined to burn all her foreign clothes, while her husband asks her not to wear them. Sandi Babu, a friend of Nikhil, preaches *swadeshi*. Bimala, breaks her *purdah*, meets him and he is attracted by her beauty. They become lovers, the home-made Bimala of the confined space and the daily routine of small chores is now transformed. Nikhil muses, "I longed to find Bimala blossoming fully in all her truth and power. But the thing I forgot to calculate was, that one must give up all claims based on conventional rights, if one would find a person freely revealed on truth." These musings refer to the conduct of Bimala towards Sandip, when it passes the limits of decent behaviour. But Sandip watches the whole situation with detachment. The elder Rani, widow of Nikhil's brother too could not do anything; Bimala and Sandip get more and more deeply involved, their conversation is no longer about national

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[1] Edward Thomson, *Rabindranath Tagore*, Oxford University Press, 1948, p. 194.

movement but about sex problems. In the manner of a soliloquy Nikhil analyses his strength and weakness: "I cannot dismiss myself as one of these shadows and so the load of my sorrow lies eternally heavy on the heart of my world." Bimala is aware of her unbecoming conduct, but she feels powerless against her lusty nature. She questions herself: "Shall I ever recover, as from a delirium, and forget it all; or am I to be dragged to depths from which there can be no escape in this life? . . . Every wall of this bedroom of mine, which I first entered nine years ago as a bride, stares at me in dismay."

With such utterances of psychological depth the writer probes into each of his characters. Alternately, the stories of all these characters are told by themselves as narrators. Although Sandip plays with Bimala, he does not set her on "altar of destruction." He knows that Nikhil is his friend and he feels ashamed at his own weakness. The climax is reached when the *Swadeshi* movement drains the purse of Sandip; Bimala steals her sister-in-law's allowance of Rs. 50,000 - *swadeshi* has brought her to this! In the mean-time, her relations with Sandip deteriorate. One more character Amulya is introduced to help the movement of the story. He loots the treasury, tries to return the money and gets caught. Bimala feels sorry for having chosen to live this kind of ruinous life. Nikhil also feels that he could not draw Bimala to join him in the work of creating himself. But their reunion does not bring satisfaction. We are not sure of what happens to Nikhil at the end; it is a loose story. It is the story of failure but the world it deals with is the world of politics and ineffective romance. The narrative skilfully reminds us of the narrative in some of the nineteenth century English novels, each narrator looking into his or her eart and making telling comments on situations. When this

novel was published, the ambiguous and unchaste relations of Sandip and Bimala became a matter of criticism in Bengal. Some women considered that the picture of Bimala belonged only to a high society coming into vogue slowly in the first decade of the twentieth century and not a traditional one. But Tagore replied that human nature whether of high or traditional class is the same.

In his stories and novels, Tagore concerns himself with the events around him : his views on patriotism, love, social relations among the young and old find expression imaginatively. He is a realist. There is lucidity and harmony in this vast edifice built of human contradictions. The recurrent theme of Tagore's fiction is not so much the experience of participating in contemporary life, as the anguished process of adopting to it. There is meeting of the old and the new world—the traditional world becomes more and more a file out of the past. The whole corpus of stories and novels with their multiplicity of experience leaves an impression of sanity, truthfulness, of a vast and firm ordering of a society in the making. Exciting things happened in pre-independent India : Religious forces, orthodoxy, liberalism and break down of traditional society as a result of a reformist movement. Tagore at harmony within himself expressed his views through his concept of *Jibandevata*. The sheer scale and vastness of the human world captivated him. The achievement of having stated it to himself and having caught it in poems, plays and stories, essays, almost suffices and partially distracts him from the path of continuing to know his own limitation. The meaning of life in its entirety clouds artists; their pictures, if attractive and imaginative, will be of permanent interest. Tagore's characters true to India register the lives of men and women with extraordinary capacity to live and to render their lives in art both adequate and inadequate.

Tagore is not content that literature should become a marginal minor activity with the society to which he belonged ; he was determined to produce a work which was nice, cosy or quiety contemptuous of the material world and condemnatory of the civilization, given exclusively to material pursuits. However, like Yeats he cared for both the worlds. Tradition meant for Tagore not merely extension of the line of the past into the present but preserving the best in the culture. Drawing heavily on the *upanishads*, he showed that his work was central in that he could put himself in relation to the past and show its relevance to the present. But he did not teach himself to depoetcize his epithets, open his subjectmatter to include themes of hatred and political invectives of the period. There is a heavy waft of the romantic influence in everything he wrote.

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